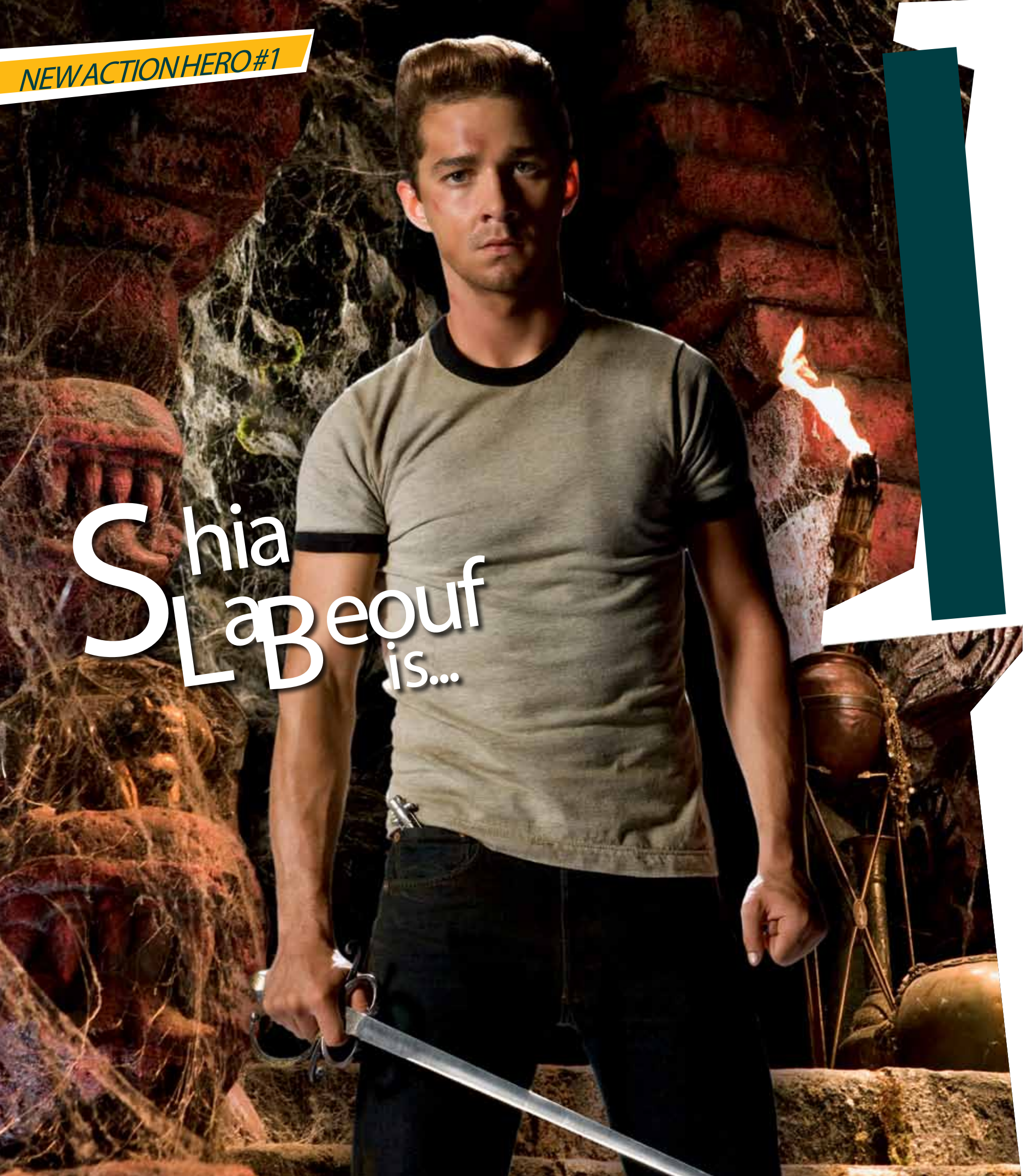


NEW ACTION HERO #1



Shia  
LaBeouf  
is...

# Indiana Jones Jr.

He's sparring with Harrison Ford in the biggest action picture of the year. But why should that worry Shia LaBeouf? After all, he's already upstaged Optimus Prime...

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN

**H**OW BIG IS THE ACTION? THE ACTION'S NUTS, MAN. I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT TO SAY ABOUT IT..." IT'S TEN O'CLOCK ON A BRIGHT FEBRUARY FRIDAY MORNING IN LOS ANGELES, AND HAVING BARELY

wolfed down breakfast, Shia LaBeouf is already speaking in superlatives. Of course, he's become well versed in dealing in terms of extremity of late — incredulous adjectives have peppered his interview answers during the course of his recent journey through studio juggernauts Transformers and Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull. The subject of his current amazement is D. J. Caruso's Eagle Eye, which he's midway through shooting.

"Have you ever seen The Parallax View?" he continues, picking Alan J. Pakula's edgy 1970s political thriller as a reference point. "Man, it's that — with ridiculous action. Basically, a mysterious woman has the power to control all the technology in the world — security boxes, cars, cell phones, internet — all the stuff that can be turned round and used against you. She uses it to frame two unsuspecting Americans as terrorists, and we're on the run. Transformers was a certain type of action film — grandiose, outlandish, insane. Indiana Jones has the humour and the action; that B-movie quality on an A-movie scale. Eagle Eye, on the other hand, is something else. It's real. It's amazing."

If anyone can be excused for this cavalcade of hyperbole, it's LaBeouf. Given that he's only 21, you could describe his career to date as the stuff dreams are made of. Except that most people don't even dream this big.

The son of a Jewish ballerina and a Cajun man who, at one point, earned the family income as a clown, LaBeouf took on his first acting gig at the age of nine. The talented youngster was quickly snapped up by the Disney Channel and, when he wasn't busy Mickey-endorsing, began

branching out into more mainstream fare: tiny appearances in The X-Files and E. R., a major role in excellent but little-seen kids' adventure Holes, 66 episodes as Louis Stevens in the unforgivably titled sitcom Even Stevens. Then, in 2002, he was cast in his first major blockbuster, Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle. The next few years would be both a blessing and a curse. Despite the exposure he got from appearing in movies like Full Throttle, I, Robot and Constantine, he was lumbered with thin sidekicky roles that failed to capitalise on his natural charisma.

**F**OREVER HUMBLE, LaBeOUF PINS THE BLAME ON HIMSELF. "I'M NOT THAT PROUD OF THOSE PERFORMANCES, BY ANY MEANS. WHEN I LOOK

back on things I've done, those seem like mistakes. But they were the correct choices at the time. I got to watch Will Smith and Keanu Reeves carry movies on their backs. It was a huge learning curve, on discovering how to deal with being that guy on set. There's a lot more that comes with being number one on the call-sheet than promoting the film and acting in it. I studied how those guys handled the crew, how they turned up on set, the way they never got sick."

LaBeouf's work ethic, well, worked. In 2005, during visits to the set of voyeur thriller Disturbia in his producer capacity, Steven Spielberg noticed LaBeouf's humility and maturity, qualities no doubt in short supply in teen >>

movie stars, and the most powerful man in Hollywood took him under his wing. It's a relationship, LaBeouf says, that extends beyond the movie lot. "I look to Steven as a mentor. I'm basically running with him — if Steven thinks it's a good idea, I'm not going to question him. I go to him for advice on career things, and life things, too."

The first role Spielberg handpicked for LaBeouf was that of Sam Witwicky, the lead human in Michael Bay's *Transformers*. Between scenes of mechanoids pissing on government agents and shit blowing up real good, the part finally exposed LaBeouf's amiable charm to a mass audience. Of the in-development sequel, he will only say, "If the first one was an indicator of how massive 'massive' can be, this is going to blow that out of the water. Mike's doing insane shit again."

But that was only a dress rehearsal for the main event: *Indiana Jones IV*. Where *Transformers* was all about visual flash, the Indy franchise relies heavily on the banter between its characters. Picking LaBeouf to play the most important new addition to the series — '50s greaser Mutt, who may or may not be Indy's long-lost son and whose brash attitude will likely rub the archaeologist's rhubarb before the two bond through exotic dangers — Spielberg bet that his protégé could hold his own against gruff old Harrison Ford. It's a responsibility the fledgling star — who says that, until recently, he read every spite-filled talkback thread about himself on *Ain't It Cool News* — takes very seriously.

"It was *terrifying* to join this franchise. Everything you imagine it is, is exactly what it is. You don't want to be the addition who ruined everything. And you know there's going to be so much critique, that it can be quite daunting. But Harrison always used to say before every take, 'Alright, let's shoot this piece of shit.' It was his way of alleviating the pressure. Another hats-off thing about Harrison is that he's the troop leader — he's General Patton; the guy leading the surge. When you're around him, you don't feel that pressure."

Obviously, LaBeouf is keeping quiet on precise character details (like Mutt's true parentage), but he's happy to reveal his inspirations for the part: "I watched *Blackboard Jungle* a lot, and watched *The Wild One* all the time. I would steal mannerisms and words. Basically, that's what my research was: just theft! I mean,

## The LaBeouf File

Born: Los Angeles, California, 11/06/86.

First seen in: Schmaltzy Xmasploitation pic *The Christmas Path* (1998).

Last seen in: *The Rear Window* remake-ish *Disturbia* (2007), in which LaBeouf was the teened-up James Stewart.

Finest hour: His raw, compelling performance as the young Dito Montiel in sweaty urban drama *A Guide To Recognizing Your Saints* (2006).

In the pipeline... After *Indy IV* comes a re-team with *Disturbia* director D. J. Caruso for thriller *Eagle Eye*. Then there's *Transformers 2*... He's the next... Tom Hanks, surely.



the closest picture you can get of the time is in film, and so Steven would bring these DVDs in for homework." And Spielberg, it seems, wasn't against his star bringing his own ideas — or rather, cutlery — to the table. "I'd bring a switchblade in and say, 'Hey, Steven, what do you think of this?' I had worked on it for a month and a half, flipping it and being able to mess around with it in a cool way. I'd film myself and bring the DVD to show Steven and he'd say, 'Yeah, that's awesome.' So then we'd implement it. It's amazing how much freedom he allows."

## OTHER STARS HIS AGE MAY BE NECKING SHOTS AT THE CHATEAU MARMONT, BUT THE FRESH-FACED LABEOUF IS DOING HIS BEST TO KEEP HIS

head down and let his work speak for itself. "I feel like a better person when I'm working — I enjoy it more than anything else in my life. And the pool-party, tons-of-chicks, binge-drinking bullshit — that's not what I got into this for. I have a very productive, enjoyable lifestyle and none of the things you see on shows like *Entourage* are part of it. It would drain me; I don't think I'd be able to manage."

During the past three years, he's only had two weeks away from work. When he does get time off-set, he says he spends it paintballing, dirt-biking, catching Dodgers games and doing his laundry. It's an impressively clean-cut, paparazzi-frustrating lifestyle... with just one blot. Towards the end of last year, having just wrapped on *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, LaBeouf flew into Chicago to begin *Eagle Eye*. On November 3 — a Saturday — he decided to let off some steam. At 2am that night, at a Walgreens pharmacy where he'd somehow ended up, absolutely wasted, he was arrested for refusing to leave the store.

"That was complete and utter insanity," he says now, happy to address the only serious stain on his record. "I was an asshole, and it was a mistake I'm still completely embarrassed about. I was in the middle of a strange mind state, having just come off a three-month window of focus. I can't diminish what happened at all. But I can say this: I'm not the first 21 year-old to be arrested for a misdemeanor. There are lessons in life I need to learn, and I'm learning all of them in front of the public."

Altercations with chemists aside, things couldn't be going any better for the guy who recently scored BAFTA's Rising Star award. His name's at the top of every Hollywood casting agent's wish-list, his face a familiar sight on the towering billboards of Sunset Strip, his body insured for millions of dollars. What's more, he's keenly aware that the challenge now is to stay grounded.

"I'm still learning how to cope with it all. Fame is not as fun as one might think. There are certain obvious bonuses, you know? It's not hard to meet women. But once you meet someone, there's a whole bunch of stuff that comes with that. Like, why is she talking to you? That's why you hang out with people who don't give a shit about any of that. My closest friends work in coffee stores. They don't give a shit about a *Vanity Fair* cover — I'm just another asshole to them. And that's what I want: people who'll tell you you're a shithead sometimes."

He pauses and looks to the future. "Things are amazing for me now, and then it won't be amazing. As long as you keep a level head and your friends still work at coffee stores, then you'll be okay."

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» **Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull** is out on May 22 and will be reviewed in a future issue.

